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THE CROSS

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BY

DONALD HANKEY

AUTHOR OF "A STUDENT IN ARMS"



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I

WITHOUT His death upon the cross the teaching of Jesus would never have been understood. The Cross shattered the disciples' illusions, and it shatters ours; it compels us, as it compelled them, to take the teaching of Jesus literally and seriously. It is the epitome of His teaching.

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Jesus taught by His example as well as by His words that the values men put on things are false.

Men did and do respect position, outward respectability. Jesus did not. He only respected honesty and sincerity. The frank sinner was more hopeful in the eyes of Jesus than the ostentatiously pious Pharisee. By dying the most ignominious death possible—the death of the slave—He compelled men to see that if they were His disciples they must not be respecters of persons.

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Men did and do respect success. The disciples of Jesus believed in Him because they thought that in the end He was going to be a King, and they His chief favorites. Men of to-day are inclined to adhere to the Church when it is a success, when it is popular and influential and a leader of popular movements. Jesus did not value worldly success. He taught that men ought not to think of success but of pleasing God. They were to be fearless critics, breaking with custom and tradition, opposing popular move-

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ments, if they thought them wrong.

By dying on the Cross Jesus achieved the nadir of worldly failure. He compelled men to see that if they were to be His disciples they must not flinch from it, but be prepared to accept it in demonstration of their faith that God is more important than men, His pleasure more important than public opinion.

Jesus taught that he who would be great in the Kingdom of God must be the servant of

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all. In dying on the Cross He showed that there was no limit to service; it must be without reservation. He gave His life that men might see the truth. His followers must be ready to give their lives for the same cause.

Jesus taught that all the misery and injustice and cruelty of life were in the hands of God, and in those hands would work together for good. By dying on the Cross He showed the reality of His faith. It was no pious hope, no vague optimism; it was

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the fundamental principle of His teaching which He put to the proof by His death.

Jesus taught the love of God; but when a man is very loving and very forgiving and tender, there is always a danger that he may be lacking in strength of character. There are many amiable people who go about with a cheerful smile doing good, whom one would not trust to be heroic. By His death on the Cross Jesus showed that He was not weakly sentimental, but that in His case love was combined with inflexible determination

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and courage, and a power to face the sternest facts of life.

His disciples, too, must beware of being soft and sentimental. They must also be strong and fearless, or they are none of His.

Thus the Cross of Jesus sums up His contempt of men's values, His humility, His faith in God and contempt of worldly success, His limitless love, His faith in the ultimate triumph of goodness, His strength and courage.

The Cross of Jesus teaches His disciples to despise worldly

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honours and success, and to look only for honesty, sincerity, and faith in God. It teaches them that in their service of God and man there can be no reservations; they must give up everything when their loyalty to God or their love for men demands it. It teaches them that faith in God must be real if it is not to be valueless, and that faith involves perfect fearlessness, and unflinching facing of the sternest facts of life.

Thanks to the Cross Christianity can never rest at being a

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popular movement, a shallow optimism. Thanks to the Cross we are compelled to face all the facts that make belief in a good God difficult. Thanks to the Cross we have evidence that Christ was not blind to the difficulty of His teaching, but accepted it and showed unmistakably that it did not affect His faith in it.

The Cross is the supreme triumph of an optimism which accepts all the facts which are the foundations of pessimism. It is justified in the Resurrection.

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II

THE Cross is more than the epitome of a prophet's teaching, because Jesus was more than a prophet. It is the salvation of the world, because Jesus was the Son of God.

When Jesus died upon the Cross, He passed from things temporal into things eternal, from mortality into immortality. Jesus was the perfect man. His manhood was taken up from the abyss of human contempt into the highest glory of God.

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Jesus lives. We know it, because when we try to obey Him, and to pray to Him honestly, we feel His presence. The fact that Jesus lives in God, and in eternity, means that man can live in God and in eternity if he is at one with God. That is to say, that the Cross of Jesus shows that in spite of the extremity of worldly failure a man may hope for eternal life with God if only he can be at one with Him.

But man cannot be at one with God. His will, which is himself, is not at one with God's

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will, and never can be. The imperfect will cannot make itself perfect.

Salvation is being at one with God. If the Cross can do what we cannot, and make us one with God in will, the Cross has saved us.

First of all the Cross makes us realize that we are not at one with God. It makes us realize that the world which could crucify Jesus was utterly at discord with God. And when we compare our world with that, we

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know that the discord still prevails.

The Cross is the age-long witness that the world is found wanting. It sets a goal ahead, and allows no rest or complacency until that goal is reached.

But it not only shows the imperfection of mankind, it shows each individual his own imperfection. It presses home the fact that the innocent suffer for the guilty. Jesus suffered because of the wickedness of His generation, and not because of His own wickedness. So, too,

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our wickedness or imperfection causes others to suffer. No matter how much we repent or reform, we can never undo the effect of our contribution to the wickedness of the world. It is not the punishment of themselves that makes men ashamed—it often only makes them hardened; it is witnessing the effect of their actions on other people whom they did not want to hurt.

This is the first step in the Salvation of the Cross. It makes us loathe sin because it shows us that no man sins unto himself. It takes away our false idea that

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we can undo our own sin by reformation, by showing us that its effect passes beyond our grasp. All the sin that has been and is being woven into the history of the world cannot be eradicated by us. It is continually tainting the future, for the future is the outcome of the present, and pure water does not flow from a tainted source.

This involves pessimism unless we believe in God. But according to Christianity the Incarnation was the infusion of divinity into mankind, the infusion of the incorruptible into

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the corruptible. Into the vicious circle of history, where good and bad are continually reproducing themselves without hope of ever evolving only good, is introduced a new factor, a creative factor,—God.

Moreover, that new factor is infinity, and compared with infinity the finite equals nothing.

God alone, the creative principle which is all-embracing, can save the world and bring order out of chaos, good out of evil.

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In the incarnation God entered humanity. In the Crucifixion that divine humanity was taken up with God. Henceforth we are not without hope, because He whom we can understand and love and trust, because He who understands and loves and trusts us, is in God.

When God entered humanity, the sin of mankind, which continually causes pain and suffering indiscriminately on mankind, the sin of ourselves, which is continually poisoning the lives of those who are not our-

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selves, was taken upon Himself by God. The death of Jesus upon the Cross was no mere solitary event; it was the symbol of the eternal fact which existed before and exists for ever after the event that we are not in a vicious circle, that human history is not one endless chain of causation where sin is always breeding sin, for God is in the circle, and in the long-run the sin of the world will work itself out on His imperishable goodness, and we shall all be clean.

But this is not all. This is

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only an abstract theory, which calls for personal verification. Can we be sure that the effect of our sin ultimately comes to good in the goodness of God? Can we be sure that sin is gradually being wrought into good?

Before we can be sure, we must ourselves plant our feet in the way of Salvation.

God through Christ is in humanity. But how? True, Jesus was once man, but His manhood was driven out of the world by the Crucifixion. Was

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not the Crucifixion man's rejection of God's Salvation?

“Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.” They knew not what they did, and the Father forgave them. The Saviour that they spurned and drove away from the world came back in spite of them to those who were willing to receive Him.

Jesus lives in mankind to-day. He lives in the wills of His disciples. All who are humble, who hate their sin, and turn to

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Him for help find His spirit coming into their lives, transforming them, giving them courage for fear, love for selfishness, hope for despair.

The Church is the body of Christ. Not the Roman, Greek, Anglican, or Free Church, but the company of all those in whom the Spirit of Jesus dwells.

These are the salt of the earth, these are the light of the world, these are the leaven which leaveneth the lump.

This, then, is the gospel of

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the Cross. Sin, whatever its origin, is transmitted from generation to generation. Sin, whoever the perpetrator, has an effect which is only limited by mankind. Sin can only be abolished by a new birth, a change of will, which the sinful will itself cannot effect. But God enters. God suffers. The sight of God's suffering brings the desire for good and the hatred of sin home to man. They turn to Him. They ask for the infusion of life-giving spirit which shall destroy the sin in their wills.

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They are answered. The answer is this. They can share in the Spirit of God, in the good - creating, sin - destroying Spirit of God only on one condition—that they share His suffering for the world.

Salvation comes to the individual man. He receives the bread, which is the symbol of the body of Christ. He becomes a member of the mystical body in which the God-life of Christ is ever active in the world. But he also takes the wine, the symbol of the blood of Christ,

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in token that he accepts the burden and the privilege of the Cross, the symbol of the suffering of God.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens.” “Take up your cross daily.” “Lose your life that ye may find it.” The servant of Christ is the servant of man, bound to bear the burden of other people’s sins. The world is to be saved by Christ, but in the persons of His saints.

Who is saving the world?
Those women who, in the Spirit

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of Christ, go to raise by their sympathy and love the wrecks of womanhood that have been ruined by men. Those who, in the Spirit of Jesus, share the troubles and sufferings of the oppressed who are made to suffer by the selfishness of their employers. All who in any way help to bear a burden that another has imposed — doctors, nurses, clergy, sisters of the poor, ordinary men and women who in a quiet and unprofessional way help to undo the wrong that others have done. These are the body of Christ.

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In them He still lives and loves and suffers. In them the redemption of the world is being accomplished by Man.

Salvation is for the individual and for the race, and it is accomplished by God suffering in Christ, and by Christ suffering in His Body, the Church.

The individual man, thinking of the Cross of Christ, thinking of the innocent suffering for the guilty, thinking of the innocent whom he has injured, comes to hate and loathe the sin, whose work he cannot undo.

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He feels shut off from God; out of tune with the heavenly harmony, he despairs.

Humbly he approaches the human Jesus, God's love incarnate. To Him he confesses humbly and penitently his sin and his impotence.

He receives forgiveness and a part of the burden of the Cross.

What does this mean? It means that through Jesus he comes to the Father. In spite of his sin he comes into the presence of Goodness. He is put in

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touch with that higher power which can alone instil life into his corruption, and restore his sickness to wholesomeness. This is forgiveness. But this involves partaking in the nature of God. And God is ever suffering for Mankind. The forgiven man is told not to be self-satisfied, not to go about prating that he is saved. He is given a work to do for God—to share the love, which means to share the suffering which is part of the glory of the Eternal.

So the Church was established

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by the blood of the martyrs. So now it is not by costly ceremonial, by well-trained choirs, by eloquent sermons, that the salvation of the world is being accomplished, but by the humble love, the meekness, the tenderness, the purity, the unselfishness, the fearlessness of the saints in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells. Not only in missions, in hospitals, and in schools is this being done, but in every place where there is unselfishness, purity, and fearless rectitude. In poor homes the Christian mother or father, son

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or daughter, by trying to make the family happy, are shaming those who are inclined to be selfish. In barrack-rooms the pure and fearless soldier is shaming in Christ's name those who are foul, and those who for fear of public opinion are weak. In Borough Councils, the fearless Christian is shaming those who would use their office for their own ends. In business the unselfish partner is shaming those who would extract gold from the blood of their employees. In workshops the pure and fearless man or boy is shaming the

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shirker, the dirty-minded the blasphemous. In every walk of life the redemption of the world is being accomplished by those servants of Christ who gladly bear His Cross, in whom the Spirit of Christ is triumphing over heredity and environment, and introducing a new life which is eternal.

In some other world the process is going on with those who have passed from here. There, too, the love of God is recreating, transforming evil into good.

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We preach Christ crucified to them that are being saved the wisdom of God and the power of God.

The sacrifice of the Cross was not a transaction which altered God's attitude towards man; it was the revelation of an eternal fact—that God is love, and that where there is imperfection love means suffering, and that in this suffering of God lies salvation. It was the revelation of this to men, and when taken in conjunction with the life of Jesus, the sacrament of the Last

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Supper, and His risen life, it enabled His disciples to count on the fact that it revealed, to get into conscious touch with that which alone could save them, and to learn the way of salvation for themselves and others, which is the way of the Cross.

The Cross of Christ is what gives weight to all His teaching. Had Christ simply been one of the hundred and one teachers who preached more or less eloquently that earth's failure was often heaven's success, He would have ranked with them as great, noble-minded, but remote.

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Instead of that, He became the source of a spiritual power which has no parallel in history. The power which enabled a handful of Jews to convince the whole western world that their Rabbi was the Son of God, and had risen from the dead, did not emanate from the Sermon on the Mount, but from the Cross and what followed. Jesus not only preached that one must seek first the things of God because they were the only things that mattered; He also sought them, and in doing so defied the powers of earth to do their worst. On Cal-

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vary there was enacted in its most dramatic form the eternal struggle between matter and spirit, between temporal power, worldly ambitions, reliance on physical strength on the one side, and faith in God, in the divine in man, in the eternal life of the spirit, in the superlative importance of love, honesty, truth, courage, purity, and all the spiritual virtues, to the absolute exclusion of physical strength, worldly success, wealth, popularity, and all the sordid things that men make false gods of.

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It is a good thing to realize what an absolutely sordid and degrading thing crucifixion was. It is difficult to imagine any way in which you could more effectively show your absolute loathing and contempt for a man than by scourging him, and then nailing up his naked bleeding body, barely raised off the ground, to be mocked and spat on by His enemies, and to be the helpless victim of their filthy insults. All that Jesus went through. It reminds one of Elijah pouring water over his sacrifice, to demonstrate the power of his God.

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If Christ could survive such an end, well, He must be something more than a charlatan indeed.

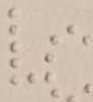
Christ did survive the Crucifixion. Something that happened afterwards convinced His disciples so effectually that they were able to convince the world in which they lived, that Jesus, who had defied the powers of the material world, and had suffered them to do their worst, had won. The Galilean had conquered. The bit of "crucified carrion" became the Master of countless generations of men. The victory of the spirit over matter had been

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fought, and matter was conquered.

It is that representative victory of Christ that has enabled millions of men and women to believe in their best selves, to conquer temptation, to pursue the highest, to risk poverty, persecution, suffering, and death rather than betray truth, honour, and love. It has saved them from the abyss. It has brought them into living contact with God—made them “at one” with Him, “atoned” them.

The Crucifixion and Christ’s victory exemplify an eternal



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law, that redemption comes through pain, and corruption through material success. It is by the innocent suffering that the sins of the wicked are washed out. The more innocent the sufferer, the more patient and willing, the greater his or her redeeming power. It is when a man sees the results of his selfishness in causing misery to people whom he never meant to injure that he begins to feel shame. It is when his children are born imbecile or deformed that a man regrets his career of drunkenness or the immorality which has

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infected him with venereal disease. It is when he sees his comrades killed that the sentry begins to be ashamed of his lack of vigilance. It is when he sees younger fellows, who have followed his example, losing their freshness and cleanness that a man begins to regret his vices. So, too, it is the ministrations of the innocent, their love and care and help, that are able to mitigate the evil that is done by the selfishness of the wicked. Like lambs led to the slaughter, these innocent victims "take away the sin of the world," they "make

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intercession for the transgressors," they are the "Christs" who redeem mankind by bringing them to repentance and to God.



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